

FCC Consumer Advisory

The DTV Transition and Over-the-Air Viewers Along U.S. Borders

The digital television (DTV) transition refers to the switch from analog to digital broadcast television. Congress has mandated that after February 17, 2009, full-power television stations in the United States will stop broadcasting in analog, and will continue broadcasting in digital only. Some consumers living along the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada currently watch analog television programming broadcast over-the-air by Mexican and Canadian stations. Canadian TV stations will also transition from analog to digital broadcasting, but not until August of 2011. Mexico has begun its transition and will complete it in 2021.

U.S. consumers living along the Canadian and Mexican borders are able to watch television programming from Canadian or Mexican broadcast stations with an over-the-air antenna, such as "rabbit ears" on their set or an antenna on their roof. Because broadcast stations in Mexico and Canada will not complete their transition to digital broadcasting at the same time as full-power U.S. stations, their broadcasts will remain in analog after February 17, 2009, while full-power U.S. broadcast stations will be available only in digital.

If you have an analog-only television that receives free over-the-air programming with an antenna, you will need to purchase a digital-to-analog converter box in order to watch digital broadcast television. Each U.S. household is eligible to receive two \$40 coupons to be used toward the purchase of two digital-to-analog converter boxes. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is administering the coupon program. (Please note that these coupons will expire 90 days after mailing). More information can be found at www.dtv2009.gov, or by calling 1-888-388-2009 (voice) or 1-877-530-2634 (TTY).

If you purchase a digital-to-analog converter box to watch digital broadcasts on an analog TV and also wish to continue watching analog programming broadcast from stations in either Mexico or Canada, you should purchase a converter box with "analog pass-through" capability, which allows analog broadcast signals to pass through the converter box to be tuned by your analog TV. Converter boxes with analog pass-through capability will also enable you to watch U.S. low-power and translator television stations, most of which will continue to broadcast in analog after February 17, 2009. (For more information on low-power and translator TV stations, see our Consumer Advisory entitled "The DTV Transition and LPTV/Class A/Translator Stations," located at www.dtv.gov/publications.html.)

NTIA's TV Converter Box Coupon Program has certified converter box models that have analog pass-through capability. A current list of coupon-eligible converter boxes is

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available at https://www.ntiadv.gov/cecb_list.cfm. The converter box models that have analog pass-through capability are noted on the list with an asterisk next to them. In addition, NTIA will mail a list of current coupon-eligible converter boxes, noting with an asterisk those that have analog pass-through capability, to each household that receives converter box coupons. You can also check with your retailer to determine whether the converter box you are purchasing has analog pass-through capability.

If you purchase a digital-to-analog converter box without analog pass-through capability, you may have to connect an "A/B switch" and/or a "signal splitter" to bypass the box if you wish to view analog TV broadcasts. Check with the manufacturer of the digital-to-analog converter box and your retailer if you need instructions on how to connect the box to view broadcasts from both analog and digital stations.

For more information about the DTV transition, go to www.dtv.gov or contact the FCC by e-mailing dtvinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.

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